

State of Internal Trade

Canada's progress on internal trade in 2025



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Introduction

Domestic trade barriers weaken Canada's economic foundation. Carve-outs and exceptions limit where free trade applies, creating a patchwork of inconsistent regulations, paperwork, and delays, which make it unnecessarily difficult and expensive to move goods, provide services, and/or work across jurisdictions. While some regulations and barriers stem from legitimate concerns that require careful consideration, others are political or protectionist in nature and have no place in modern Canada. The burden of these barriers does not fall on businesses alone; it is ultimately passed on to consumers in the form of higher costs and fewer choices. A domestic market riddled with barriers also sends the wrong signal to global investors, undermining Canada's efforts to attract and retain investment and expand international partnerships.

Recent research from the International Monetary Fund shows that Canada's economy could gain nearly 7% (\$210 billion) in real GDP by eliminating internal trade barriers.¹ The economic stakes are enormous, and momentum to address these challenges has grown over the past year. As trade tensions with the U.S. intensified and negotiations continue to stall, Canadian political leaders renewed their focus on things within their control: modernizing trade within our own borders.

Several governments have taken important steps by legislating or tabling mutual recognition policies to simplify regulatory processes across jurisdictions. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) recognized these efforts by awarding strong grades in our annual [Internal Trade Report Card](#), which was released on June 30, 2025. Since then, governments have achieved many more notable milestones.

This snapshot takes stock of government progress since the release of CFIB's report card—highlighting where momentum continues, where gaps remain, and what it means for small businesses across the country. This progress report also serves as a reminder that governments must follow through on their promises, and continuously prioritize internal trade.

Highlights

- 2025 marked one of the most active years on internal trade in nearly a decade. Several provinces introduced mutual recognition legislation, governments signed a flurry of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and other agreements, and Ottawa advanced major reforms through Bill C-5. While momentum has clearly accelerated, implementation gaps and uneven provincial approaches remain significant obstacles.
- The signing of the Canadian Mutual Recognition Agreement (CMRA) represents a major national breakthrough. However, the agreement still excludes key areas such as food, alcohol, labour, and services, and includes differing party-specific exceptions. The agreement's success will depend on transparent, coordinated implementation across jurisdictions.
- Many provinces passed mutual recognition legislation and/or signed MOUs, but the substance varies widely. Several laws exclude labour, exempt Crown corporations, or rely on "reciprocation," creating subjective and inconsistent application. MOUs often signal intent without delivering measurable outcomes, amplifying the risk of a fragmented patchwork of rules.
- Provinces are moving at different speeds and with different models. Some—like Nova Scotia, Ontario, BC, and New Brunswick—have demonstrated significant leadership. Others have slowed or stalled, either delaying legislation, limiting scope, or relying on MOUs that lack follow-through. This uneven progress underscores the need for coordinated national alignment.
- Governments signalled a historic shift to advance direct-to-consumer (DTC) alcohol shipping with a first-ever DTC MOU. However, this commitment lacks timelines, clarity, or actionable pathways. The alcohol industry overall continues to face some of the most entrenched restrictions in Canada, with consumers and producers still waiting for meaningful change.
- Several jurisdictions advanced work under the federal-provincial-territorial (FPT) trucking pilot designed to align standards and reduce regulatory duplication. While promising, progress remains unclear without full transparency of the MOU and its implementation plans.
- Canada sits at a pivotal moment: the past year has brought real momentum, but risks remain. Without coordinated implementation and an expanded scope, governments could unintentionally create new layers of red tape. To move toward a truly unified internal market, FPT governments must expand mutual recognition to food, alcohol, labour, and services; accelerate DTC reforms; align federal-provincial responsibilities on food movement; and publish clear action plans with measurable outcomes.

Major internal trade progress in 2025

Game changer: Historic pan-Canadian Mutual Recognition Agreement on the Sale of Goods (CMRA)

Since the first edition of its State of Internal Trade report card, CFIB has consistently recommended that governments adopt mutual recognition—a simple but powerful rule: if a good or service is approved for sale/use in one jurisdiction, it should be automatically approved for sale/use in all jurisdictions. For years, CFIB has championed mutual recognition as the most efficient, least bureaucratic way to eliminate unnecessary internal trade barriers—preferable to harmonization, where progress can often stagnate or drag on.

This principle was finally put into place nationally on November 19, 2025, as the Committee on Internal Trade (CIT) announced a historic breakthrough: the signing of the pan-Canadian Mutual Recognition Agreement on the Sale of Goods (CMRA); a transformational development for small businesses and Canadians across the country. Under the CMRA, goods approved for sale in one province or territory can be sold in any other Canadian jurisdiction without additional/duplicative testing, paperwork, or extra fees. The agreement covers thousands of products, including toys, clothing, industrial goods, appliances, and vehicles, and is set to be fully implemented by June 2026.²

It is important to note that several provinces have passed their own mutual recognition laws, which operate only within provincial borders. Provincial legislation requires the province to accept goods from elsewhere, but does not guarantee that other provinces will accept that province's goods in return. The CMRA helps these mutual recognition legislation come to a Canada-wide recognition. This means that, all provinces and the territories will need to implement mutual recognition legislation, and only those that do, can fully participate in the free movement of goods, and meet CMRA obligations. In effect, the CMRA establishes a single, Canada-wide rule where approval anywhere becomes approval everywhere.

CFIB applauds British Columbia for its early leadership, which played a significant role in advancing negotiations and shaping the final agreement. BC was the initial sponsor of mutual recognition when CFIB first recommended the policy, and it was added to the Regulatory Reconciliation and Cooperation Table (RCT) work plan in 2021.³

Despite this breakthrough agreement, limitations remain. As mentioned, legislation is needed, and several categories are excluded from the agreement, including food, live animals, alcoholic beverages, cannabis, tobacco, and plants. In addition, jurisdictions may still adopt specific carve-outs, allowing governments to retain requirements in areas they choose to exempt from recognition (listed under Annex A in the CMRA agreement).⁴

The signing of the CMRA marks a major milestone, but its impact will depend on strong implementation and continued political will. Governments must ensure that the agreement is fully implemented on time, with minimal carve-outs. CFIB will be monitoring the situation closely to ensure carve-outs remain limited, transparent, and justified. Further, the CMRA should become a foundation for future expansion. Governments must move quickly to explore expanding this agreement to additional excluded categories—particularly food and alcohol, which remain among the most persistent sources of internal trade barriers.

Lastly, the CMRA should pave the way for tackling barriers beyond goods. Mutual recognition in services and labour mobility represents the next frontier in reducing interjurisdictional friction. While several provinces already have the legislative tools to pursue this, a coordinated national approach would deliver far greater benefits.

Headlines vs. reality: Mutual recognition legislation & MOUs

Provinces and the federal government demonstrated unprecedented leadership on internal trade in 2025 by moving from discussion to action, introducing legislation and signing MOUs aimed at making mutual recognition a practical reality.

Legislation formally authorizes and regulates mutual recognition through clear, enforceable legal obligations. It provides the necessary framework to translate commitments into real, consistent outcomes. In a bold and historic move, Nova Scotia set the stage in February with Canada's first-ever mutual recognition legislation, breaking new ground and signalling a significant shift in ambition.⁵ Prince Edward Island, British Columbia, Ontario, Manitoba, Quebec, the federal government, New Brunswick, and Saskatchewan soon followed, collectively displaying the most substantial legislative momentum on internal trade in decades. However, it must be noted that, due to its often prescriptive nature, legislation can also far reduce the scope of what can be implemented, leaving important sectors or policy areas unaddressed.

In contrast to legislation, Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are used as a lighter, more flexible tool. MOUs help governments signal intent, build alignment, and pilot new approaches without the time and complexity required to pass legislation. However, their non-binding nature also limits their effectiveness. MOUs do not create enforceable obligations, leaving businesses uncertain about what (if any) changes will materialize and when. They also vary widely in scope, detail, and implementation timelines, which can reinforce the patchwork of rules across jurisdictions. While MOUs can serve as useful stepping stones, their impact ultimately depends on whether governments follow through with clear, binding commitments and consistent application across sectors.

Figure 1 (below) provides an overview of all legislation and MOUs signed. This level of legislative effort deserves recognition, as it reflects a serious commitment to reducing barriers and improving economic mobility within Canada.

Figure 1

Read figure from left to right to see which jurisdictions your jurisdiction recognizes as reciprocal.

Overview of jurisdictional legislation and MOUs													
	C.-B.	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PEI	NL	YK	NT	NU
BC		↻	↻	↻	↻	↻	↻	↻	↻	↻	↻	↻	↻
AB			🤝		🤝						🤝		
SK		🤝		🤝	🤝				🤝				
MB	→ 🤝		🤝		→ 🤝		→ 🤝	→	🤝				
ON	→ 🤝	🤝	🤝	→ 🤝		→	🤝	→ 🤝	→ 🤝		🤝	🤝	🤝
QC	↻	↻	↻	↻	↻		↻	↻	↻	↻	↻	↻	↻
NB	↻	↻	↻	↻	↻	↻		↻	↻	↻	↻	↻	↻
NS		→		→ 🤝					→				
PEI			🤝		🤝		🤝						
NL							🤝						
YK	🤝	🤝			🤝							🤝	🤝
NT					🤝						🤝		🤝
NU					🤝						🤝	🤝	

- ↻ Reversal arrow symbol refers to unilateral MR legislation.
- Single arrow symbol refers to reciprocal MR legislation.
- 🤝 Handshake symbol refers to MOU signed.

Note: Figure should be read from left to right to accurately identify which province recognizes another as reciprocal. Some jurisdictions do not have arrows despite having legislation because their reciprocal designations have not been identified. MOUs are signed by both parties and do not need reciprocation, which is why the handshake symbol can be seen under both row and column. However, most legislation needs reciprocation (except in BC, QC, NB where legislation is unilateral and does not need reciprocity). This is why some jurisdictions have arrows under rows but not under columns.

For example, looking left to right, BC unilaterally recognizes AB in its legislation, which is why there is a reversal arrow, but AB to BC has no symbol because AB has no legislation.

The above figure does not capture the caveats and discrepancies within each piece of legislation and MOU. Despite strong and commendable progress, the practical application raises concern. Each piece of legislation and MOU varies across jurisdictions, creating uncertainty around how mutual recognition will function in practice.

Provincial legislation

One of the most significant issues when it comes to legislation relates to “reciprocity requirements.” With the exception of British Columbia, Quebec, New Brunswick, and the federal government (whose legislation is unilateral), jurisdictions require other governments to be deemed “reciprocal” before mutual recognition can apply. This has resulted in confusing and sometimes contradictory designations. For example, Manitoba recognized New Brunswick as one of the reciprocal provinces in July 2025, despite New Brunswick not having announced legislation at the time. Conversely, PEI passed mutual recognition legislation at the time but has not been designated as reciprocal.⁶ A similar case is seen in Nova Scotia, where the government deemed Alberta as a reciprocal province despite Alberta not introducing similar legislation.⁷ These inconsistencies raise questions about how governments are determining reciprocity and how businesses are expected to interpret or rely on these designations.

Complicating matters further, most legislation includes broad and varying exceptions. For example, Saskatchewan’s proposed bill excludes the provision of goods or services by a Crown corporation, those included in construction contracts, and regulated professions as defined in the *Labour Mobility and Fair Registration Practices Act*.⁸ Manitoba similarly excludes goods and services provided by crown corporations, certain regulated professions and occupations, or those otherwise exempted by regulation.⁹ Quebec has indicated it will provide a list of exceptions, but has offered no timeline. The federal legislation delegates significant decision-making authority to federal regulatory bodies, allowing them to independently determine what is or is not covered—raising the possibility of inconsistent approaches across sectors.

Implementation timelines and details also remain unclear for most legislation. For instance, there is no clarity on the status of items currently on the Regulatory Reconciliation and Cooperation Table’s (RCT) Work Plan—specifically whether they will be mutually recognized or treated as exceptions and continue down the harmonization path. Governments have also not indicated whether key areas such as Workers’ Compensation Board registrations or Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) rules will be mutually recognized. Furthermore, although many provinces have passed mutual recognition legislation, Ontario has indicated that only Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and the federal government will immediately qualify for mutual recognition upon passage of Ontario’s regulation.¹⁰ Adding to the confusion, British Columbia has indicated that regulations and policies will be updated to accommodate mutual recognition, but only within a set timeframe (May 28, 2027), increasing the possibility of leaving gaps unaddressed and limiting long-term flexibility.¹¹

These variations and the lack of clarity risk creating the very outcome mutual recognition was intended to solve: a patchwork of differing rules and regulations rather than a coherent national system. CFIB has consistently raised concerns around these challenges, and urged governments to adopt and implement a consistent, unilateral approach. Without greater clarity and ease of use for businesses, jurisdictions may see changes to their scores in future editions of the report card.

Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)

Depending on how governments decide to utilize them, MOUs can create a significant challenge, as they may not deliver tangible results. Ontario, for example, has signed more MOUs than any other province, but there is yet little evidence of meaningful outcomes stemming from them. Under Ontario's proposed mutual recognition model, the province would allow the free flow of goods and services only with "reciprocating" jurisdictions with mutual recognition legislation. In Ontario's draft regulation, only six jurisdictions are proposed for designation as reciprocating partners (Canada, British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec). Of these six, only three are designated to be immediately recognized upon filing of Ontario's regulation (Canada, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia).¹² This signifies that signing MOUs is not enough to qualify jurisdictions as reciprocating, underscoring their limited ability to deliver real, operational outcomes on their own.

Another illustrative example that shows the inefficiency of MOUs is Ontario's MOU with Manitoba, which committed both governments to developing a bilateral direct-to-consumer alcohol shipment agreement by June 30, 2025—despite Manitoba already permitting DTC.¹³ The deadline has passed with no public clarity on the status of the agreement or whether Ontario has a framework ready for implementation. A further example underscoring the limits of MOUs is Alberta's position on mutual recognition legislation. Alberta's MOU with Ontario suggests the province will pursue legislation similar to Ontario's model.¹⁴ However, Alberta has yet to introduce its own mutual recognition bill, leaving a noticeable gap in Ontario's list of reciprocating jurisdictions. This gap between MOU commitments and legislative action further demonstrates why MOUs alone cannot be relied on to deliver real progress.

If governments intend to continue using MOUs, CFIB recommends establishing clear, public timelines that jurisdictions commit to and follow, clarifying how MOUs will interact with legislation, and standardizing the structure and scope across jurisdictions to ensure consistency.

Movement on alcohol trade, yet critical gaps persist

The ability to ship alcoholic beverages (such as Canadian wine, craft beer, and craft spirits) from one province to another, by way of direct-to-consumer (DTC) sales, has been an outstanding frustration for businesses and consumers alike. For many small producers, this is a critical pathway to growth, and for consumers, it significantly expands choice and access to Canadian-made products. CFIB has consistently highlighted this issue since the first edition of the Report Card, noting that Manitoba was the only jurisdiction that permits all DTC alcohol sales (wine, beer, and spirits). Since then, New Brunswick has been the only other province to fully implement DTC.¹⁵

Therefore, it was a welcome development when, at the March 2025 Canada's First Ministers' meeting, many governments committed to enabling DTC sales for Canadian alcohol products. Following these commitments, eleven jurisdictions on the CIT signed an MOU to advance DTC alcohol sales by May 2026: Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Yukon.^{16,17}

While the newfound willingness to move ahead with DTC signals a major step forward, governments fell short of fully seizing the opportunity. As trade tensions led to the removal of U.S. alcohol from many retail shelves, there was a clear opening to fill the space with products from Canadian producers, yet outdated internal barriers continued to prevent expansion into new provincial markets.

Liquor stores across Canada routinely boast shelves filled with a broad selection of international alcohol products, yet Canadian products from other provinces/territories are often absent. A traveller who discovers a unique craft beer in Alberta or boutique wine in British Columbia will almost certainly be unable to find that same product back home in Ontario, PEI, or Quebec. This lack of availability is not due to inferior quality or weak consumer interest. Rather, it stems from outdated and inconsistent trade regulations, burdensome entry requirements, and a lack of transparency in markups and pricing structures that restrict interprovincial movement.¹⁸

To truly modernize the alcohol marketplace, governments must go beyond DTC. CFIB continues to urge governments to expand access to include wholesale and retail channels, ensuring small Canadian producers can compete on a level playing field and consumers can enjoy a genuine 'One Canadian' marketplace. CFIB also encourages all jurisdictions to follow Manitoba and New Brunswick's lead by accelerating timelines for DTC implementation so Canadians can realize the benefits sooner.

Modernizing interprovincial trucking regulations

The transport sector faces significant challenges when it comes to moving goods across provincial and territorial boundaries.¹⁹ Logistics experts must navigate different sets of rules, requirements, and administrative processes (e.g., adjusting weighting, using different tires depending on the province), creating unnecessary complexities and costs. These regulatory barriers translate into real economic consequences. For the trucking industry alone, regulatory barriers are estimated to increase freight costs by approximately 8.3%—a nontrivial figure at a time of heightened economic uncertainty and ongoing global trade tensions. A study by the Macdonald-Laurier Institute suggests that removing these barriers through mutual recognition, where appropriate, could generate as much as \$1.6 billion in annual economic gains.

Governments are not blind to this issue. Through the RCT, the CIT has attempted to reconcile regulatory differences, including those related to tires, spring weight restrictions, size and weight restrictions, and truck driver certification entry-level training.²⁰ However, the reconciliation process has been slow and inefficient. Two out of four negotiations have been deferred, and while the other two have reached agreement, not all jurisdictions have implemented the harmonized measures.

In response, the federal government launched an interjurisdictional trucking pilot program in September 2024, co-chaired by Newfoundland and Labrador, originally supported by Ontario, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Nunavut, with all other remaining jurisdictions joining to participate later in the year.^{21,22} The pilot's goal is to mutually recognize regulatory requirements to reduce administrative hurdles and facilitate the efficient movement of goods across the country. In November 2025, after observing the pilot rollout, CIT ministers endorsed the MOU on Interprovincial Trucking, developed in collaboration with the Council of Ministers Responsible for Transportation and Highway Safety. Once approved by federal-provincial-territorial (FPT) transportation ministers, this MOU will be made public.²³

While CFIB applauds this program and all Canadian governments for their participation, concerns remain. To date, there has been little clarity on what businesses and individuals can expect from the MOU. Additionally, despite participation in the program, it has been unclear whether all jurisdictions have agreed to the proposed MOU, raising further questions about how effective and comprehensive the initiative will be.

To turn this pilot into meaningful progress, governments must provide clarity on the practical impacts of the MOU, including what rules will be mutually recognized, how enforcement will function, and implementation timelines. Equally important is aligning all jurisdictions without unnecessary carve-outs to avoid creating an uneven patchwork that fails to deliver a seamless national system. CFIB encourages governments to commit to transparent reporting so that small businesses can see real measurable reductions in cost and complexity.

Jurisdictional scan: What is moving (and what is not)

British Columbia

2025 Report Card grade: 8.5 (B+)

British Columbia was the first jurisdiction in Canada to introduce unilateral mutual recognition legislation. However, the province has yet to implement it and has not signalled intent to include labour as part of its mutual recognition work. Until the bill takes effect, businesses will not see any benefits. BC's legislation also includes a sunset clause, under which regulation and policy amendments tied to the legislation can only be made until May 28, 2026.²⁴ While setting a firm deadline may help accelerate processes in the short term, its rigid structure and the implication that no further changes can be made after that date risk leaving gaps unaddressed and limiting long-term flexibility.

These concerns, though, could soon be addressed by the recently announced *Bill 5: New Trade Recognition Act*, which aims to make the province's interprovincial recognition framework permanent and ensure extending its application to services. BC has been influential in shaping national momentum. Ensuring timely and sector-wide implementation and revisiting the sunset clause will be key to maintaining its position as a model for other jurisdictions. CFIB looks forward to a swift passing and implementation of Bill 5.

Alberta

2025 Report Card grade: 8.0 (B)

Alberta continues to serve as co-chair of the federal, provincial, and territorial (FPT) Labour Mobility Working Group, maintaining an important role in national discussions on worker mobility. However, once considered a leader on internal trade, Alberta has lost its momentum. While other jurisdictions have moved ahead with reforms, Alberta has fallen behind on key initiatives.

Alberta's MOU with Ontario suggests the province will pursue legislation similar to Ontario's mutual recognition model. However, Alberta has not introduced its own legislation. The province also previously held the lowest number of CFTA exceptions but has now been surpassed by Ontario and the federal government, both of which have eliminated all exceptions. In addition, Alberta is among several jurisdictions with a substantial list of party-specific exceptions under the CMRA. While these carve-outs are much smaller in scope than CFTA exceptions, they nonetheless reduce the agreement's overall effectiveness and weaken Alberta's standing as an internal trade leader.²⁵

Alberta's influence in internal trade discussions remains significant, but restoring its leadership will require renewed action.

Saskatchewan

2025 Report Card grade: 7.7 (B-)

Saskatchewan is co-leading the framework to advance DTC alcohol sales.²⁶ The province has also signalled broader ambition, as Premier Moe invited all Canadian premiers to join the New West Partnership Trade Agreement (NWPTA), which aims to mutually recognize and reconcile rules affecting trade, investment, and labour mobility.²⁷ Saskatchewan was also one of the latest jurisdictions to table mutual recognition legislation.

Like many other jurisdictions, Saskatchewan's legislation requires reciprocity without defined criteria determining which jurisdictions qualify. The bill does not apply to the provision of goods or services by a Crown corporation, those included in construction contracts, and regulated professions as defined in the *Labour Mobility and Fair Registration Practices Act*.²⁸ Saskatchewan also maintains a lengthy list of party-specific exceptions under the CMRA, which further limits the agreement's impact.

Saskatchewan must address these legislative gaps to help ensure a smooth and timely rollout of the DTC framework. CFIB also advises the province to take caution when relying on the NWPTA, as the agreement has clear limitations. Under the agreement, mutual recognition does not apply in several key areas, such as OHS rules and Workers' Compensation registrations—both long-standing frustration points for small business owners.

Manitoba

2025 Report Card grade: 8.9 (A-)

Since the release of the 2025 Report Card, the province has identified four reciprocal provinces under the *Fair Trade in Canada (Internal Trade Mutual Recognition) Act*: BC, Ontario, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia.²⁹ Additionally, while subject to change, Manitoba is currently one of only four jurisdictions that have not listed any party-specific exemptions under the CMRA—placing the province among the strongest performers in reducing internal trade barriers. However, challenges remain. The province's mutual recognition legislation requires reciprocation, and excludes goods and services provided by Crown corporations, certain regulated professions and occupations, or those otherwise exempted by regulation. The province has also not clarified the criteria for selecting "reciprocal" provinces.

This lack of transparency risks creating confusion for businesses and undermines otherwise strong leadership. Providing clear rationale for reciprocal designations would further reinforce Manitoba's leadership position and support more predictable, barrier-free trade for small businesses.

Ontario

2025 Report Card grade: 9.2 (A)

Since the release of CFIB's Report Card, Ontario has demonstrated significant leadership, particularly on labour mobility. The province expanded its "As-of-Right" rule across professions covered by more than 50 regulatory authorities and 300 certifications. Beginning January 1, 2026, Canadians in certified professions can begin working in Ontario within 10 days, once credentials and requirements are confirmed by the regulator—a crucial step toward reducing labour shortages and improving workforce mobility.³⁰ Ontario is also the only province to confirm that it has no party-specific exceptions under the CMRA and the CFTA, strengthening its position as a national leader in lowering internal trade barriers.

Ontario further capitalized on the momentum of the CMRA by launching a consultation on the regulation to implement its mutual recognition approach, in which CFIB participated. Ontario emerged as one of the most influential drivers of internal trade, but the next step is action. As the province moves toward finalizing its framework, CFIB looks forward to clarity on key elements of the legislation, including reciprocation requirements, implementation timelines, and additional details on the MOUs, such as their status, content, measurable outcomes, and how they are intended to align with the legislative model.

Successful implementation of Ontario's legislation, supported by clear transparent updates, will be essential for the province to fully realize its potential and deliver meaningful progress for businesses.

Quebec

2025 Report Card grade: 6.0 (C-)

Quebec has shown more willingness and initiative this year than in any previous report card cycle to engage on reducing internal trade barriers. Notably, Quebec was the only province other than BC (and later New Brunswick) to make its mutual recognition legislation unilateral, signalling a stronger commitment to opening its market, not waiting to require reciprocal action from other jurisdictions.

However, key gaps remain. While the legislation has received Royal Assent, implementation details have yet to be clarified, leaving businesses uncertain about when and how the legislation will operate in practice. This uncertainty is amplified by the absence of a full published list of provincial exceptions, which the province has yet to release. In addition, while Quebec's language requirements will continue to be fully respected, greater clarity is needed on how they will interact with mutual recognition to ensure businesses are not left navigating conflicting or unclear obligations. Quebec also continues to maintain 27 exceptions that have a broad impact under the CFTA and holds the longest list of exceptions under the CMRA covering a broad scope of goods—significantly limiting their impact.

Quebec's increased engagement is encouraging, but meaningful progress will require reducing unnecessary restrictions and providing clear implementation guidance to ensure businesses can operate without barriers that tie their hands.

New Brunswick

2025 Report Card grade: 6.6 (C)

Since the release of the Report Card, New Brunswick removed four party-specific CFTA exceptions, bringing down its total from 22 to 18.³¹ The province also made amendments to its *Fair Registration Practices of Regulated Professions Act*, requiring regulatory bodies to issue a notice of receipt once they receive an interprovincial applicant's registration documents. From that point, until a final decision is made, the applicant is deemed registered and permitted to practice—a crucial step to improving workforce mobility.³² On November 4, the province tabled a unilateral MR legislation, *Free Trade Within Canada Act*.³³ Additionally, Premier Holt sent a letter to the other Atlantic premiers urging them to commit to developing an agreement that would make Atlantic Canada a free trade area, signalling a regional push.³⁴

New Brunswick's legislation does not apply to services that may only be provided by a member of a regulated profession under the *Fair Registration Practices in Regulated Professions Act*, nor to goods and services exempt from the CFTA and the CMRA.³⁵ However, it is worth noting that New Brunswick's

CMRA exceptions are relatively smaller in scope, which helps mitigate some of these limitations and positions the province more favourably than others that maintain broader carve-outs.

New Brunswick's recent initiatives shows a big leap forward. While CFIB is encouraged to see its progress, we remind the government that meaningful improvement on the ground will depend on ensuring that implementation of mutual recognition is broad and clear, and exceptions are further eliminated.

Newfoundland and Labrador *2025 Report Card grade: 6.0 (C-)*

Newfoundland and Labrador continues to co-chair the federal-provincial-territorial (FPT) trucking pilot working group. While the province did not initially sign onto the MOU for DTC of alcohol products, it later joined following consultation with stakeholders.³⁶ Additionally, while subject to change, Newfoundland and Labrador is one of only four jurisdictions that have not listed any party-specific exemptions under the CMRA—displaying the province's willingness to move on internal trade.

To date, the province has not introduced mutual recognition legislation, and tangible progress toward reducing barriers remains limited. Moreover, although the province co-chairs the trucking pilot, there has been little public transparency regarding what businesses across Canada can expect in terms of outcomes and timelines.

Newfoundland and Labrador shows encouraging signs of engagement, but meaningful progress will require concrete action, clearer communication, and a more defined plan for advancing internal trade reforms.

Prince Edward Island *2025 Report Card grade: 7.8 (B)*

While PEI has passed mutual recognition legislation, it has yet to be implemented. Like many others, it requires reciprocity, and its scope excludes regulated professions under the *Regulated Health Professions Act* and *Registered Health Professions Act* as well as members of the Law Society of Prince Edward Island.³⁷ PEI has also not clarified the criteria for determining which jurisdictions qualify as reciprocal, creating uncertainty for businesses trying to understand where recognition will apply. In addition, the province maintains a lengthy list of party-specific exceptions under the CMRA, limiting the overall impact of national mutual recognition.

PEI has made a meaningful stride in 2025, but its full potential will only be realized once legislation is implemented, reciprocal criteria are clearly defined, and unnecessary exceptions are reduced.

Nova Scotia *2025 Report Card grade: 9.4 (A)*

Nova Scotia made a historic mark on internal trade this year by becoming the first jurisdiction in Canadian history to announce, legislate, and implement mutual recognition. With mutual recognition now implemented, businesses from designated reciprocal jurisdictions can access Nova Scotia's market without facing duplicative requirements. The province also updated its alcohol regulations to allow

residents/producers to buy/sell alcohol products from/to different jurisdictions by DTC—another big step toward reducing trade barriers.³⁸

As in every jurisdiction, OHS and workers' compensation registrations still require compliance with differing provincial standards. Additionally, Nova Scotia has not clarified the criteria for selecting reciprocal jurisdictions, causing confusion. For instance, Alberta has not introduced mutual recognition legislation but is listed as a reciprocal province.³⁹ Conversely, BC has passed unilateral mutual recognition legislation but is not included on the list.

Nova Scotia's leadership has been undeniable, but ensuring consistency, transparent criteria, and broader coverage of mutual recognition will be essential to sustaining its position at the forefront of internal trade reform.

Yukon

2025 Report Card grade: 4.6 (D)

Since the release of the Report Card, the Yukon removed five exceptions under the CFTA, taking effect as of July 8, 2025.⁴⁰ While this step represents movement in the right direction, progress is only modest, as the Yukon previously held the highest number of CFTA exceptions in the country (30 in total).⁴¹ Notably, the Yukon was the only territory to sign onto the MOU allowing direct-to-consumer (DTC) shipment of alcohol.⁴²

Northwest Territories

2025 Report Card grade: 5.8 (D)

The Northwest Territories was the 2025 CIT chair. The territory has not made further advancements on internal trade.

Nunavut

2025 Report Card grade: 5.6 (D)

Nunavut has not made further advancements on internal trade.

Federal government

2025 Report Card grade: 8.2 (B)

The federal government has made significant progress since the release of the Report Card. On June 26, 2025, Bill C-5: *An Act to enact the Free Trade and Labour Mobility in Canada Act and the Building Canada Act*, ("the Act") received Royal Assent.⁴³ The Act aims to advance mutual recognition between jurisdictions with equivalent regulatory frameworks, and to accelerate major nation-building projects. Shortly afterward, the federal government also removed all of its remaining party-specific CFTA exceptions, reducing its total from 13 to zero.⁴⁴ The federal government is the only other jurisdiction to confirm that it has no party-specific exceptions under the CMRA.

While this represents a major step forward, tangible progress will mostly depend on the effectiveness of the Act's implementation. Key details surrounding how the new framework will operate in practice are still being worked out, and its impact will ultimately hinge on a consistent, transparent, and collaborative application across jurisdictions.

A particularly significant gap at the federal level remains the movement of food products regulated by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). Currently, food products (such as meat) that are produced, licensed, and inspected by provincial or territorial food safety authorities can only be sold within that province or territory. Only federally licensed and inspected food products are permitted to move freely across Canada. For small and medium-sized processors, accessing federally inspected facilities or meeting federal standards independently can be prohibitively expensive and complex, creating a strong disincentive to expand operations into new markets.

CFIB has long advocated, and continues to advocate, for the free movement of provincially and territorially inspected food across domestic borders. CFIB data shows that 87% of small businesses across the country support allowing provincially or territorially inspected food products to be sold nationwide.⁴⁵ Yet, governments continue to appear misaligned on the issue, often deflecting responsibility rather than working collaboratively toward a solution. For instance, Nova Scotia's mutual recognition legislation includes the movement of food, but it cannot be operationalized without federal approval. At the same time, federal regulatory bodies have suggested that it is up to individual jurisdictions to push for change. This circular dynamic has stalled progress for years, and even with the passing of the Act and the CMRA, the fundamental restrictions remain unchanged.

When CFIB raised this issue with federal stakeholders, some expressed concerns that mutual recognition could create complications with international trade agreements. They pointed to challenges around traceability, noting that once a provincially inspected product leaves its jurisdiction, tracking and recall processes become challenging. These same stakeholders had also expressed reservations about the long-term implications of permanently implementing the Lloydminster model—a program in the City of Lloydminster, which is split by the Alberta-Saskatchewan border, exempting food businesses from the federal interprovincial trade requirements when trading food to or within Lloydminster.⁴⁶

Small businesses would not object to maintaining Canada's high food inspection standard for products destined for international markets. However, applying those same federal requirements to goods—that have already passed provincial inspection—moving between provinces, and often across distances shorter than many intra-provincial shipments, creates unnecessary burdens. For instance, provincially inspected food products from Ottawa can move to Toronto (a four-hour drive) but cannot be shipped to Gatineau (a 10 to 30-minute drive), illustrating how current rules can be disproportionate to the actual risk.

While policies that oversee health and safety warrant careful attention, it should not serve as a justification for inaction. The Lloydminster program has operated successfully for over two years without adverse impacts or negative feedback from international partners. If traceability is the core concern, the federal government must work collaboratively with provincial and territorial authorities to develop solutions that enable the tracking of interjurisdictional food products to ensure safety and quality standards.

CFIB urges the federal government and its agencies to work in partnership with the provinces and territories to ensure the Act is implemented in line with its original intent: to reduce unnecessary duplication and build a truly unified Canadian economy.

Conclusion & recommendations

Last year marked a significant turning point for internal trade. What was once largely aspirational began to yield legislative traction for concrete action across the country. However, despite these encouraging developments, CFIB remains cautious that Canada may still see the same fragmentation that has persisted for decades, as the wave of differing MOUs and legislation raises important concerns.

The varying approaches found in provincial mutual recognition legislation, combined with the rapid signing of general MOUs, risk creating a patchwork of rules rather than the consistent, comprehensive approach needed to meaningfully eliminate barriers. As highlighted in the Jurisdictional Scan, much of the new legislation continues to exclude key areas such as labour, exempts Crown corporations, and relies on 'reciprocation'—a subjective category where designation varies across jurisdictions. Similar issues appear in the CMRA, which (despite being a remarkable advancement), continues to exclude food, alcohol, beverages, labour, and services, and includes an array of party-specific exceptions.

Small businesses have long raised concerns over the lack of free trade within Canada. Yet, many of these long-standing challenges continue to be left out of the conversation or are being reframed as new progress despite little tangible change. Governments must recognize that true progress is not measured by how many agreements are signed, but whether Canadian businesses and residents actually experience fewer barriers and lower costs when trading across provincial and territorial lines.

CFIB continues to urge governments to remain mindful of the patchwork risks. If each jurisdiction continues to pursue its own approach, the result could be a proliferation of overlapping rules that generate new layers of red tape rather than reduce them. Governments must, therefore, be deliberate and coordinated in implementation, ensuring these reforms lead to genuine simplification, not greater complexity. Piecemeal reforms will not break down all barriers; they run the significant risk of just reconfiguring them.

Despite the risks, internal trade reform's overall direction in 2025 gives reason for optimism. Governments across Canada have shown a renewed willingness to engage, legislate, and collaborate in ways not seen in decades. The next six to 12 months will be crucial to determining whether this momentum converts to durable change. Fragmentation could risk diluting the potential of true mutual recognition, but coordinated efforts could transform Canada's internal market in a way not seen in generations. With the next chair of the CIT set to take leadership in 2026, there is a real opportunity to drive coherence, align priorities, and push for implementation that delivers results for businesses and consumers alike.

CFIB will continue to call on all governments to deliver on the promise of freer internal trade. To continue making great strides toward freer trade, CFIB recommends all governments take the following next steps:

- Ensure transparent and consistent implementation of the CMRA, including publishing guidance on how exceptions will be interpreted, a schedule for reviewing and reducing party-specific exceptions, and clear public reporting mechanisms to track government progress and ensure consistent application.
- Make provincial mutual recognition legislation unilateral instead of reciprocal to avoid confusion and additional red tape.

- Expand mutual recognition legislation and agreements to include sectors and products that have been excluded, including food, alcohol, labour and services.
- Provide clarity on the interprovincial trucking MOU, including what rules will be mutually recognized, how enforcement will function, and implementation timelines.
- Resolve jurisdictional finger-pointing, particularly on food movement, and establish a coordinated FPT approach to safety and traceability.
- Accelerate long-promised reforms, such as enabling direct-to-consumer shipment of alcohol across all provinces before May 2026.
- Increase transparency and improve accessibility of information from provincial liquor boards, including pricing and listing.
- Simplify the licensing and distribution process for alcohol producers looking to sell in other provinces.
- Publish a Committee on Internal Trade's multi-year action plan with clear and streamlined timelines, and deliverables for all internal trade initiatives, to ensure transparency and accountability.
- Standardize the definition of "Canadian business" across all jurisdictions if prioritizing Canadian businesses in government procurement.
- Provide clarity on RCT Work Plan items in relation to new legislation and agreements. Align the items with small business priorities and estimate the economic impact.

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CFIB is a non-partisan organization exclusively representing the interests of 100,000 small and medium-sized businesses in all sectors across Canada. CFIB's research capacity is second to none because it is able to gather timely and concrete information from members about business issues that affect their day-to-day operation and bottom line. In this capacity, CFIB is an excellent source of up-to-date information for governments to consider when developing policies impacting Canada's small business community.

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